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SECTION TWO.

THE PERFECT DAY

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Love, Humor, Mystery and Adventure in the Wild West

CHARACTERS IN THE STORY.

MISS GERTRUDE LUCRETIA WHEELER—Courtied by numerous young frontiersmen, but showing a preference for one.

MR. TUBS WHEELER, her father; a prosperous land owner and perfectly willing to add to his worldly possessions.

"SPUD" WALLIS, who is deeply interested in Gertie and has some of the characteristics most in favor with her father.

CHARLIE SIMPSON, "Spud's" chum, who is handy when some kinds of jobs are to be done.

JOE HASKELL, "plumb full of ginger and a good looker," standing high in the favor of Mr. Wheeler.

ROBERT WHALEN, "SHRIMP" DWYER and their friend "BILL," all enterprising but none conscientious.

BILL PANKY, whose alias is Old Jim Hendricks.

MR. TUBS WHEELER sat on the shady porch before his store. The store was perched on a wide ridge separating and overlooking two great valleys. From the west a mile of brown river, the Rio Grande, made a dead set at this ridge, turned southward, at right angles, and presently averted to the southeast, leaving behind it a perpendicular bank thirty feet high and half a mile long.

It was some eighty yards from Mr. Wheeler's feet to the precipice, and in those scanty yards a single track railroad, the wagon-road and the big Dona Ana Mother-Ditch crowded, following the river's curve.

Far down the narrow highroad a shod hoof rang on a stone. A string of horses swung jauntily into sight. A tall horseman lolled easily in his saddle.

"Humph! That fool, Spud Wallis!" Wheeler sniffed.

The fool, Spud Wallis, drew rein before the store. He was a tall, raw-boned, broad-shouldered man with a berry-brown face and twinkling blue eyes.

"Know where the Tumble-T wagon is?" asked Spud.

"Left this morning for Point o' Rocks," said Mr. Wheeler shortly.

Mr. Wallis rolled his eye at the sun. "I can terrapin along up there this evenin'." After dinner," he added pointedly.

Mr. Tubs Wheeler spoke accusingly: "Now, young man, you just natchelly mosey right along out of this!"

"Why, Mis-ter Wheeler! An old-timer like you, and grudge a body a meal's victuals."

"Meal's victuals be blowed!" said Wheeler wrathfully. "I ain't going to have you making up to my girl."

"Oh-h! I see-ee! Gertie?" said Spud. He looked up, frank-eyed. "Say, that's a good idea. I'll go see her right away now!"

Mr. Tubs Wheeler towered tiptoe. "Look here, Spud—I ain't got anything against you, as a man, but a fellow that wants a wife has got a right to get some stuff together first."

"Well," drawled Spud reflectively, "what's the matter with my little bunch of cows?"

"That's just it. You don't know nawthin' but cows—and cows is nix, nada. That day's over. Summerford, Joe Haskell, Herron—they got farms for themselves ready for the big ditch. Look at Joe Haskell, now. He's got as fine a piece of land as there is in the bend. And when there's no work for him on the farm, he goes teamin' on the dam. There's a forehanded man."

"Yes, Joe stacks up pretty fair—but Joe Haskell don't figure in this case," said Spud. "He likes some one else better than he does Gertie."

"Who?" demanded Mr. Tubs Wheeler, sharply.

"Why, just himself. So we'll leave him out of the question. And Herron?" Spud said consideringly.

"H'm-m! Well, really—"

"Well, what about Herron? Don't you ever take a drink?"

Spud slid from the saddle. "I don't care if I do," he said.

"You banshee!" cried Wheeler. His scowl ended in a broad grin. "Come along with you."

When they returned to the porch, Spud Wallis sank into a chair.

A touring car stood in the deep road between track and ditch. Two men were on their hands and knees peering

under. A sound of clinking steel came through the heated air.

"I SUPPOSE when that good road gets through to the dam, the cars'll be thicker'n flies," said the young man disconsolately.

Wheeler chuckled. "Do you think they'll build that good road down there, where there's no room, and only

a matter of years till the river gnaws the bank away? No, sir-ee! The Dona Ana Ditch'll go through the hill back of my house, and the good road will go over my hill—that's what. And they'll pay little old Tubs Wheeler a good big price for a right of way. "Maybe the railroad'll have to move, too, some time. And when Mr. Big Old He-Ditch comes here, Mr. Ditch'll make a big cut—or a tunnel,

maybe—through my old ridge—and there's another right of way. Four—count 'em—four!"

"Jo-ve, Mr. Wheeler, you suhtenly are a wondah!" Spud drawled. "And you want Gertie to have a man that'll cipher out plays like that? What's the matter with that car?" he inquired as the automobile started, then stopped again.

"Lost something, I guess—see 'em



THE OUTLAW PRODDED BILL WITH A GUN MUZZLE. "YOU'LL HAVE US IN THE DITCH! SIT UP, YOU, OR I'LL SHOW YOU TO KINGDOM COME!"

down the road all stooped over. Let's go see."

But Wallis dreamily considered country beyond the river.

"How the river makes a big oxbow opposite here?" he mused.

"Like the roads and ditches row in together and build a slant-wise, where the river runs his way and turn it right across that neck of land—maybe digging out some for a starter—and leave this place all safe and hunky, a mile out of danger and lots of room. It ought to be cheaper. Only one patch of land to buy, and that all grown up to tornillo and cottonwood saplings."

Wheeler's jaw fell. "Cracky, they could do that!" he exclaimed. "That ground, now—it belongs to old Pablo Montoya's boy. I'll just go over there and buy it to-morrow—then I'll be fixed, either way. Well, I'm sure obliged to you, Spud."

"Oh, that's all right," said Spud generally. "Let's go and see what's lost."

THE strangers met them at the car. One was a middle-aged man of slight build and severe but prosperous appearance, with a panama hat, gold-rimmed eyeglasses and close-clipped and grizzled mustache. He wore a duster and long black driving gauntlets. The other was a much younger man. His stalwart six feet were arrayed in white flannel, his shirt-sleeves were rolled up, his collar turned in. His face was smooth shaven; he had wide, honest brown eyes under heavy brows; his mouth was small, red and well shaped. Curly chestnut hair showed under his careless cap; his hands were soft, white, plump and perfectly cared for.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said. "I have lost a very valuable diamond ring. Could we get you to help us look for it?"

"We will pay you well for your time," prompted the older man.

"Of course—certainly," said the young fellow, smiling pleasantly.

"Whether we find it or not," added the other.

"Oh, but I say, old chap, we must find it. I can't afford to lose that ring, really."

"You stand to lose enough to buy you a box full of pretty rings if we don't get to Grindstone to-night," said the little man.

"Sure we'll help you," said Wheeler. "Do you know where you had it last?"

"Oh, yes," said the youth, leading the way. "It is somewhere between here and where we tinkered up the machine. I took it off and laid it on the running-board—on this side. Oh, we're sure to find it."

"I hope so, Robert," said his companion. "For we can't stay here long. I'd rather buy you another ring."

"It isn't so much the value of it, Mr. Dwyer—though it cost a pretty penny, I believe," said Robert. "But—it was poor old dad's."

"Oh!" said Dwyer, less brusquely. "In that case, we'll stay till the last possible moment." Slitting the sand through his gloved fingers, he looked up at Wheeler. "You see we have to meet a party at Grindstone to sign up an important mining proposition. He comes on the 5.40 train and we have to be there. Phew! But it's hot!"

"It's going to be some job," said Wallis. "There's a heap of sand. Look now—I got a mount of horses up here, squandering all over the country. I'll round 'em up and put 'em in the pen first, before they stray off. I'll be right back. Any wagon that comes along, you want to make 'em drive on the other side of the road."

He did not come back at all. "Reckon some of his horses quit him," said Wheeler, wiping his dripping brow.

BUT half an hour after Spud's departure Joe Haskell rode down from his farm. In the corral he found Spud's mount, and on the porch he found Spud himself in joyous conference with Miss Gertie Wheeler.

Joe glowered from the step. "Well! You two seem to be enjoying yourselves," he said.

"Yes—don't we? It's right cool and pleasant here," said Spud. His eye wandered to the busy scene down the road.

"What's up?" said Haskell, following Spud's gaze. "Lost something?"

Spud explained.

Joe sniffed; his black eyes snapped. "I'm going to hunt for that ring," he declared, and stalked down the sunken road to join the search party.

"Now, there's a nice boy," said Spud, admiringly. "Plumb full of ginger. Good looker, too. And thrifty—my! Did you notice, Gertie, he didn't even say good morning to you? Some way he didn't seem right pleased."

After much searching Joe marched back. Spud hailed him cheerfully.

"Find it, Joe?"

Joe shot him a triumphant look. "No, but you sure missed out, old-timer. They paid us \$10 apiece. I'm going to 'lope down to Willet's and have a screen sent up to run the sand through."

He strode on to the corral.

"Spud Wallis," said Gertie, as soon as Joe was out of ear shot, "you're holding out something. I know you where's Joe?"

like a book. You're up to some devilment."

"Gertrude Lucetta," said Spud. "I'd scorn to deceive you. I am."

Joe whisked around the corner on a fat and fiery black.

He was a crack horseman, and not averse to proving it. Nearing the car the horse snorted, shied, and stopped, all a-quiver.

Joe plied whip and spur. One plunge—two—at the third, horse and man went over the thirty-foot bank into the Rio Grande. The sound of a terrific splash rose to the silent porch.

Gertie gasped.

Spud smote his knee in vexation. "There!" he said, "I told him this morning not to do that!"

"Spud! He'll be killed!"

"Him? No! The water's deep under the bluff. We might go look." He picked up Joe's hat as they raced to the bank. "Wish I could ride like that," said Spud.

They were in mid-stream, swimming strongly. Joe clung to the horse's tail and acted as rudder.

"BEATS all where that Joe Haskell is," grumbled Wheeler. "Maybe he went over the ridge. That's it—couldn't make his horse go by your car, I reckon."

Mr. Dwyer snapped his watch decisively. "Robert," he said, "we can't wait here any longer. Mr. Wheeler will doubtless find your ring. He can wire you at Grindstone when he does."

"I suppose so," said Robert reluctantly. "Mr. Wheeler, I shall depend on you and your friend to keep up the search. I have decided to double that reward—make it an even thousand. That is about all the ring is worth; but I wouldn't lose it for twice

"Gone to Willet's, after a screen."

"How'd he go—over the ridge?"

"He went down the river."

"What?"

Spud explained and Wheeler's bad humor disappeared in laughter.

"Well, that's a good one. We'll have to tell that to the strangers. You might as well stay to dinner, Spud."

"No," said Spud. "I'm feeling bad. If you'll leave me put my horses in your pasture, I'll go up to Rincon on the passenger and see the doc. Oh, say, Mr. Wheeler. If I make good as a business man—better than Joe, say—or as good as you—you'll have no further objection to me as a son-in-law, would you?"

"Now, Spud Wallis, don't you pester me!"

"That's a bargain, then. If I can outdo you and Joe—"

"Drat you, yes—and welcome. Let's go tell the gentlemen about Joe and his horse."

The gentlemen were greatly amused.

"He'll get well paid for it, at least," said Robert. "A thousand if you find the ring—a hundred apiece anyhow—that's the bargain. Here's my card. Wire me at the hotel at Grindstone. Goodby."

They climbed into the car and whirled gayly away.

MR. WHEELER puffed into his inclosed courtyard, with an exultant whoop.

"You, Spud! We found it!" he shrieked jubilantly.

Spud appeared at the corral gate.

"Got the ring, eh? That's good. Who found it—you or Joe?"

"Neither one. Feller came along the track trampin'. He asked us

Most train time. Spud—so long! I'm going to tell Gertie the good news."

"Oh, I heard about it all right, papa," said Gertie, tripping demurely through the corral gate. "Congratulations! I'll expect a new dress."

Wheeler gave the pair a withering look. "Spud Wallis," he said, "go flag that train! There'll be no little tender partings, please."

"We thought of that," said Gertie, blushing and laughing. "Goodby, Spud—again!"

"Goodby, Gertie—again! There's the train," said Spud. "Come on."

Spud waved his hat back and forth across the track. The engine whistled twice in acknowledgment.

"Oh, I wanted to tell you. No use for you to try to buy that place of Montoya's boy," said Spud as the train slowed up. Spud swung on the smoker step. "Some one bought it a month ago."

The train gathered headway. Wheeler ran alongside, red-faced, and shouted up to Spud.

"Who bought it?"

Spud looked down at him benevolently.

"I did," he said.

THE wagon road ran beside the track across the Bend. Spud was gratified, where the desert road left the river, to observe a touring car toiling up the sandy slope that led to the desert.

At Rincon, Spud hunted up Charlie Simpson, his particular crony. When the train started again, both were passengers. Simpson carried a long repeating rifle tucked under his arm.

At Rincon the railroad leaves the river, climbs painfully up Lookout Hill, and strikes across the desert. Spud got off at Hess, the second siding; Simpson waved joyous farewell from the car window.

The Tumble-Tee wagon was in plain sight on the mesa beyond Lookout Draw; a great dust rose from the cutting-ground beyond. Spud set out for a two-mile walk to the wagon.

Where the first curve of the road hid them from Wheeler's, Messrs. Dwyer and Whalen drove the car under an overhanging cottonwood and halted. They opened the toolbox and laid the tools on the running board, businesslike fashion; but they spread robes out in the shade and composed themselves for a peaceful sleep.

Long afterward a man on foot came up the railroad track through the quivering heat. He was roughly clad and bore a little bundle on a stick. He clambered down the embankment and thrust a coarsely shod, pebbled foot into Mr. Whalen's immaculate ribs.

"Wake up," he said gruffly. "a pay for your night's lodgin'!"

Whalen sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Ugh—ah—oah!" he said. "Well, Bill, did the Hicks come through?"

"Two hundred—hundred and eighty net," said Bill crossly. "I tried to rib 'em up for more but the young one made such a squeal that I took what I could get. Come now, let's get out of this."

Dwyer removed the number plate. Ill. 41372, and substituted Ky. 12306. "It's just as well," he said. "We've worked that gar for all the traffic will bear. 'Twon't be safe to work it again till we get up in Oklahoma."

THEY were a long hour climbing the sandy slope to the level of the desert. Then they enjoyed a substantial luncheon from the hamper. Bill opened his suitcase, shaved carefully, and attired himself in joyous apparel. His spirit rose accordingly.

"Bloole!" he said, throwing the discarded garments into a mesquite bush. "Home, Jeems!"

It was past mid-afternoon when they drew near to Hess. At the round-up wagon, half a mile to the right, the cook's fire blazed brightly; beyond it, a few riders held a bunch of cattle near the trampled round-up. The horse-herd grazed beside the road, guarded by a youthful wrangler, seemingly asleep in the saddle. A hundred yards farther on the car came to the rim of Lookout Draw and turned down the steep and sandy slope.

Half-way down, Bill threw the brakes and stopped the car with a jerk. "Wake up, you fellows! Look there, will you?"

Down the slope from the Point of Rocks, across the draw, came a wild rider in a whirl of dust. Beyond and a little behind him another horseman raced at top speed. He was shooting at the first man; he was forcing him obliquely along toward the car. Scattered far behind, spread in a straggling fan across the draw, a dozen cowboys rode furiously after. A yell came from behind; the horse wrangler, frantically urging his horse, tore down to the car; a low-headed boy, wide-awake now and pop-eyed with excitement.

He screamed: "Got a gun? (a gun?)"

"No—what's the matter?"

The answer came in gasps. "Train robber! Bill Panky! Ten thousand dollars reward! If I only had a rifle!" The wrangler whirled back toward the chuck wagons. "Go to the station—telegraph!" he shouted back over his shoulder.

"Go to the station, hey?" jeered



UNHEEDING, THE ASSASSIN RODE CLOSE TO THE BODY AND DELIBERATELY FIRED AGAIN.

that. And if you don't find it—well, keep looking for it till we get back and I'll give you a hundred apiece anyway—keep wagons off and all that."

"But you'll have an early dinner before you go?" urged Wheeler. "We can throw something together in a jiffy. Joe'll be back by that time."

Dwyer shook his head. "Thank you very much, but we'll just wash up and go on. We have lunch with us. The road, we hear, is very slow and sandy, and we want to be on time. Come, Robert."

The car drew up before the store. Spud leaned over the rail.

"Find it?"

"No," said Wheeler. "They're going on. This way, gentlemen."

He ushered his guests in, with a black look for the young couple as he passed. He came back out at once.

"What's all this? Gertie, go in the house this minute and start dinner. Spud! You're a triflin' scoundrel."

what we'd lost, and I up and told him before I thought. He come on down and it wasn't fifteen minutes before he found it."

"Shucks! That's too bad. I was in hopes you or Joe'd get it."

Wheeler's eyelid fluttered on his cheek. "We ain't complaining any, Joe and me. We let him think it was ours and we dug up \$200 and sent him hiking up the road."

"You're the schemers," said Spud, admiringly. "Where's Joe?"

"He's gone on home. Huffy, Joe is—huffy at you. Eight hundred and twenty dollars—pretty good morning's work, I think. You'd just as well have been in on it."

"Only eight hundred, isn't it?"

"They paid us twenty in advance, Spud," said Wheeler triumphantly: "you see now why I don't make you welcome here. Whilst you was philandering around Joe, was on the job."

"But I'm not huffy," objected Spud, placidly, "and Joe is."

"There'll be other days for Joe."

Whalen. "In front of that scrap? I guess not! Can you turn around in this sand, Bill? Lord! Look! Look!"

The first pursuer gained on the fugitive. He was reloading his revolver as he passed from sight behind a little ridge. The outlaw answered to meet him. The pursuer flashed into the open, still loading his gun; the outlaw closed in, shooting. He fired once—twice—three times; the luckless cowboy clutched at the saddle horn, fell over along the horse's neck, hung for a second and rolled off in the deep sand.

Yells of wild rage, a popping of guns filled the air. Unheeding, the assassin rode close to the body and deliberately fired again—once—twice. Bullets puffed the sand about him, but he swooped down from his saddle, came up with the gun of his fallen foe, turned and thundered across to the car. He leaped off, he scrambled toward the car, gun in hand.

"Hit her up!" he commanded, jumping in. "Give her all you got!" The car leaped forward. "Climb over in front, you little fellow!"

The outlaw prodded Bill with a gun muzzle. "You'll have us in the ditch! Sit up, you, or I'll blow you to Kingdom Come!"

For Bill was trying to duck. Mr. Dwyer was scrunched on the floor in front. Mr. Whalen, in the tonneau, was trying to squeeze himself between two suit cases.

Thus admonished, Bill sat up. On the smooth road beyond the draw the car gathered speed and shot ahead with a roar; the shots and shouts grew fainter.

As the fleeing car topped the first rise, the avengers, with one accord, jogged soberly back in little groups of twos and threes.

Even more remarkable was the conduct of the murdered man. He brushed himself, rubbed the sand from his hair, took up his sombrero, mounted his horse, captured the loose horse left by his late assassin and led him to camp. The horse wrangler rode out to meet him.

"Spud Wallis, you red hellion," said the horse-wrangler, "them fellows'll be at the North Pole by sundown."

IN the kidnapped car conversation languished.

"Pull her up, son," advised the new passenger. "We've made our get-away. Just let her trundle along. There, that's better."

He was a powerful bulk of a man, great of body and bone; he filled the eye. In his left hand he held his enormous high-peaked Mexican sombrero of thick red felt, heavily braided with silver; the other hand, carelessly holding the six-shooter, rested easily on his thigh. A massive head sat on a bull-neck. His features were heavy but not ill-shaped; his mouth was tensed to a grim straight line; his mustache was black and long; his eyes were black and hard, his brows heavy and black, the thick tangle of hair jet-black; his great red-brown face was streaked with sweat and dust.

He turned his attention to Mr. Robert Whalen. "What's the matter, brother? Got a chill?"

Mr. Whalen picked up spirit. "Great Christopher K. Columbus!" he answered. "I'm scared!"

"Chauffeur Bill flung a remark over his shoulder. "Well, you needn't put on any high-and-mighty airs about it—so am I!"

The robber laughed. "I really ought to shake you fellows down for your change," he said apologetically, "but I haven't the heart to do it, the way the play come. You done me a good turn, and I'm grateful. You just carry me along till I get a horse and we'll call it square. But if you got any guns you'd better dump 'em overboard. Gans made me nervous."

"Shrimp's got one," said Bill. "Toss it out, Shrimp, as the gentleman tells you."

Mr. Dwyer produced a dainty affair in silver and pearl.

The outlaw gave a cry of delight. "Oh, what a cunning little thing!" he cooed. "Don't throw it away, Mr. Shrimp. I'll sew it on my hat. No—I'll use it for a scarf pin." He thrust his own gun in the holster and put the new one in his pocket. "Now we'll go long, all nice and cosy," he said.

The Point of Rocks lay far behind; the railroad was close to the left. In the north, Lear-section house, water tank and telegraph shack—grew large against the sky. They crossed the railroad track and plowed through a stretch of sand.

"HANDS up! Stop here!"

Ten feet away a rifle barrel poked from behind a washed out bank. It was pointed at Bill, but in a half second it swung to cover the tonneau. "If it ain't Bill Panky! Don't move a hand!"

To steady himself in crossing the gully, Mr. Panky's hands had gripped at seat and stanchion. He now rigidly held that strained position. The car stopped astride the ditch.

A man stepped cautiously from the washout—a little man with a long 30-40 repeater. He looked very much indeed like Mr. Charlie Simpson. He held the muzzle of the long rifle with a foot of Mr. Panky's ribs.

"Put your hands on the back of the

front seat!" he ordered. "Shut your eyes!"

Mr. Panky did this. The little man reached forward gingerly for Mr. Panky's six-shooter. Getting it, with a little audible sob of relief, he cocked it, backed off a step, and laid the rifle behind him.

"Get out!" he said. "Keep them hands up! Turn around. Back out!"

Panky meekly submitted while the little man frisked him for weapons.

"What-in-hell-is-this?" said the little man, in a rising crescendo of astonishment, when he came to the little pearl-handled gun. "Turn around, Bill, let's have a look at you!"

"Why, it's old Hank!" said Mr. Panky.

"Yes—it's old Hank." The little man sat down on the bank. He had a wizened, freckled face and a stubby red mustache, which now bristled to a snarl. "Old Hank—him you bullied and run over, and cheated out of his

"Back out that car, you feller, and turn her round." He reached back for the rifle.

"You can't do that Sim—simperton," said Panky. "They'll send you to the pen for that Lordsburg job."

"They'll let me off light, me givin' myself up and bringing you in," asserted Hank confidently. "They want you, Bill. You'll swing for that conductor you got. They'll give me two or three years at most—maybe a full pardon. And you'll be hung till you're dead—dead—dead!"

"I'll give you all the money I got cached, Hank."

"You'll give me a shot in the back. To hell with your money!"

Panky wilted. He was trembling. He cried. "Take me to Grindstone, then, Hank," he pleaded abjectly. "The Tumble-Tee outfit will lynch me if you take me back that way. I—I killed a man down there this afternoon, Hank."



ONE PLUNGE—TWO—AT THE THIRD, HORSE AND MAN WENT OVER THE THIRTY-FOOT BANK INTO THE RIO GRANDE.

share on that Lordsburg money. Well, well! What a joyful surprise! I see this ortemobile a-coming, and thinks I'll just pick up a little piece of money—and here I got the drop on old Bill Panky, and 10,000 perfectly good dollars reward for him, alive or dead. I hope this will always be a lesson to us."

Mr. Panky laughed uneasily. "You wouldn't do old Bill dirt like that, old fellow."

"Yes, I would," said Hank, positively.

"I got a big bunch of money hid out, Hank—I'll whack up even with you—honest I will."

"No, you won't. You want a chance to put me to bed with a shovel—that's what you want. Here's where I get even with you, for keeps. I'm getting old, Bill—and that ten thousand will sorter ease my declinin' years."

"Maybe I was too rough on you," admitted Mr. Panky. "But I'll make it up to you. You keep the guns, Hank—take what dough this bunch has, if you want it—we'll get some horses and hit the brush for my hide-out."

"You'll hit the back track for Dona Ana," retorted Hank, ferociously.

"You did? Is that right, you fellows?" Hank asked.

"He did," said Whalen. "Cold-blooded. Shot him twice after he was down. We saw it. Then he made us bring him up here. Don't you be afraid of us. We're with you—we take you in the machine wherever you want to go."

Hank surveyed the prisoner with ferocious joy. "That settles you. I get the reward just the same—alive or dead. And what's more, if you open your ugly head for just one more word, I'll kill you right now and here. I mean it." His fingers twitched along the rifle barrel.

BY the car, the three partners had been holding a whispered conference. Now Dwyer came forward. He was very pale, but the light of greed was in his blinking eyes.

"Wait—wait a minute," he faltered. "We want to make you a proposition. We happen to have with us a considerable sum in ready cash. You couldn't very well rob us on your way to tell the court you wanted to reform. But why should you go to the penitentiary? Why wouldn't you have

us pay you a good cash percentage right here, and let us have the reward, while you go free?"

"They might send you up for a long term, you know. You never can tell," urged Whalen. "Why you might get sick and die there."

"How much?" Hank did not move his little glowing eyes from his captive. "I never did care much for the penitentiary, anyhow."

Chauffeur Bill became the spokesman.

"Fifteen hundred dollars."

"That listens pretty good. Come again. You hadn't ought to try to hold out on an old man that way," said Hank sorrowfully. "I got the guns. Try once more."

"We can scrape up a little more, between us," admitted Dwyer, reluctantly. "But it will leave us bare. We need some expense money."

"You give it here," returned Hank implacably. "Expense money be blowed! Give me two thousand even, and it's a go. But you got to go back the way you came. I'm goin' north—and I need room. The boys won't lynch him—not with you bringin' him in that way. They'll take him to Dona Ana for you. That's my last word. Take it or leave it."

The money changed hands. Under Hank's gun, Panky was trussed up with suit-case straps, his hands behind his back, and was assisted into the car. Then his ankles were strapped together. Whalen took the steering wheel with Dwyer beside him and the two Bills in the tonneau. The car turned back toward the Point of Rocks; behind it, Hank climbed to the railroad track and howled a truculent farewell.

Mr. Panky chatted freely, mainly about Hank. His companions, being in high spirits, met these lively sallies with laughter and applause. After a few miles, however, Mr. Panky lapsed to sullen silence.

A COOL breeze tossed the wayside mesquites; a fair mountain notched black and sharp across the red sun, the car came again to Lookout Draw. It chugged up the sandy slope, it turned across the plain to the chuck-wagon.

A horseman trotted out to meet the car, waving his arm. "Gee whiz! Ain't you got no sense?" he cried in an angry voice. "Get away with that devil-wagon. You'll stampede these cattle. Go 'way round, if you want to get to camp."

Whalen made a wide detour, driving slowly over the grass hummocks; dusk had fallen when he reached the wagon.

By the bright fire stood a battery of steaming Dutch ovens and pots and a vast kettle of coffee, sending out a savory incense; in the freelight, a broad, semi-circle of cowboys sat cross-legged, laughing and talking or busy with plate and knife and fork.

"Supper all ready, strangers! Come and get it!"

The hail came from Cole, the foreman, as the car stopped.

"We've got your train robber!" called Whalen triumphantly. "Here's your Bill Panky."

The semi-circle went suddenly hushed and still.

Cole rose and came forward. "Bully!" he said heartily. "Good for you! There's a big reward offered for him—ten thousand, I think. You're in luck. Where'd you get him?"

"Another man captured him," explained Whalen, modestly, "and turned him over to us to bring in." He tugged at the strap on the captive's legs. "I'll tell you about it later."

He took the prisoner's elbow, Bill assisting from behind, and helped him to the ground. Dwyer followed.

"Gosh, my feet are asleep," remarked the prisoner, to a vast silence. He shambled a step into the freelight. "Undo my arms, somebody."

Cole unbuckled the strap; the outlaw hobbled straight to a tin plate and cup. Cole spoke in a pained and shocked voice.

"Why, this isn't Bill Panky. This is old Jim Hendricks, and he isn't worth \$20 a dozen to any one."

"But he killed a man here!"

Cole shook his head. "We was just playing moving-picture cowboys."

Whalen's heart stood still. Dwyer felt a cold faintness creeping over him and leaned heavily against the mud-guard. "But our m-money!" gurgled Dwyer. "All we had—gave it to the man that caught him!"

A drawling voice rose from the fire. "What sort of a looking man? Little sawed-off runt, red eyes and brindled mustache?"

"That's him!"

"Oh, it's all right then!" said the voice. "I told him to do that." Spud Wallis, the speaker, rose and loitered over. "I'll take care of the money. You just make a little list of the rings you've lost lately, Mr. Whalen—your poor old dad's rings. Jot down the names and amounts, near as you remember, and I'll fix it all up for as far as the money holds out."

Bill stepped into the car and grasped the steering-wheel firmly.

"Home, Jeez!" he said.

And thus Spud got the girl!

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NEXT SATURDAY'S COMPLETE STORY

THE LIE THAT WAKED TOM UP

By MARY SINGER

Illustrated by WILL B. JOHNSTONE

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